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**SACRAMENTO MAN PLEAS GUILTY TO DEFRAUDING AIRLINES
OUT OF MORE THAN \$240,000**

Defendant Sold Fraudulently Purchased Tickets for Profit

SACRAMENTO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that defendant Eric John Norton, 32, of Sacramento, pled guilty to one count of wire fraud, one count of falsely pretending to be an officer or employee of the United States, and using that false status to obtain property. The defendant admitted in court to operating a scheme in which he obtained hundreds of airline tickets at reduced government prices by fraudulently representing that he worked for various committees of the United States Senate, including the Judiciary Committee, Oversight Committee, and Appropriations Committee. After purchasing the tickets, Norton used the travel agency he operated from his home to resell the fraudulently acquired tickets for a profit, causing losses to the airlines of between \$240,000 and \$1 million.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Robin R. Taylor, who is prosecuting the case, Norton contacted various travel agencies and airline personnel falsely representing that he was working for certain committees of the United States Senate and created forged letterhead for these agencies, complete with bogus seals, of the U.S. Congress and U.S. Senate, which he used to fax letters to travel agencies and airlines. In these letters he would falsely represent, for

example, that he was the Assistant Director or West Coast manager of the Senate Judiciary Committee. By posing as a government employee, Norton was able to fraudulently purchase tickets from airlines, including, US Air, United, Continental, Northwest and Southwest airlines, at reduced government prices, then resold the tickets at a profit.

This plea follows the defendant's May 2003 arrest in Bogota, Colombia, by Colombian law enforcement authorities, and his deportation to face charges in the United States. Sentencing in this matter is scheduled for February 4, 2003, before the Honorable William B. Shubb.

If convicted of wire fraud, the defendant faces a maximum sentence of 20 years of incarceration, a three-year period of supervised release, and a fine of \$250,000, per count. The maximum sentence which the Court can impose for falsely impersonating an officer or employee of the United States is three years of incarceration, a one-year period of supervised release, and a fine of \$250,000, per count.

This case is the product of an investigation by the United States Secret Service and the United States Capitol Police.

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